

Home for the Holidays....

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The title of this blog is derived from the 1954 song, '(There's No Place Like) Home for the Holidays', popularised by Perry Como but covered by many other artists, most notably The Carpenters in 1984. Though it is essentially a song associated with Christmas, the words about being at home among family and friends seems curiously appropriate in the current times.

'Holidays in the Sun' by *enfants terrible*, the Sex Pistols, a track ranked by *Rolling Stone* as 43 of the 100 Greatest Guitar Songs of All Time has its own back story. However, at the time of its release, October 1977, the UK was undergoing something of a revolution in holidays. The days of going to holiday camps satirised in 1980s BBC sitcom *Hi-di-Hi* were coming to an end and, instead, going on package holidays to Spain was a favoured way to enjoy a couple of weeks of guaranteed sun as well as food and alcohol cheaper than the staying in the UK.

The impact of Covid-19 is certainly going to make getting abroad much more difficult this year. Scientific advice to the government is that we should continue to engage in social distancing. This includes going on holiday. Indeed, though some appear to believe otherwise, Covid-19 remains a serious threat and the danger of infection is as great as ever.

Though eleven deaths resulting from coronavirus was announced by the Department of Health and Social Care on Monday, taking the official number who've died "in all settings after testing positive for Covid-19" to 44,830 this might be expected. A rapidly decreasing rate of deaths indicates success in lockdown imposed following the dramatic statement from Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the early evening of Monday 23rd March to "Stay at home".

However, as has been apparent for quite some time, official figures for Covid-19 do not tell the whole story of how significant mortality due to Covid-19 has been. According to [the BBC](#) data from statistical agencies, 54,510 deaths in the UK mention Covid-19 on the death certificate and excess deaths since the commencement of the pandemic is just under 65,000.

Regardless of the cheerleading from the government as to what a marvellous job they claim they've done during the Covid-19 pandemic, other countries are not so impressed.

Accordingly, it hardly comes as a surprise that Michael Skapinker, who's been writing on the travel industry for [The Financial Times](#) for almost 40 years, there is anxiety in many countries to which people from Britain traditionally go to for their summer holidays. In his article, 'Frequent flyer: why the world loves — and hates — British tourists' considers why what he believes to be "longstanding ambivalence has been accentuated by the UK's handling of Covid-19".

The numbers are quite incredible. The 2.9 million British people who visited Greece in 2018 constitute a tenth of the visitors. A staggering 18 million people visited Spain last year. British 'holidaymakers', an expression I've always loved as quaint, are valuable in terms of the money they bring and there is no doubt they love their summer holidays in the sun.

As Skapinker reports, a recent YouGov poll discovered that people in "Spain, France and Italy were more opposed to the arrival of UK tourists than of any other Europeans (although they were even more hostile to Chinese and American visitors)."

Every country that has imposed lockdown properly will know the incredible effort this took by citizens. There was a very high economic price to be paid. Countries that have suffered deaths and

economic decline, regardless of how much British tourists are worth, are fully aware of the potential threat that will accompany their presence.

Skapinker describes the tendency for certain resorts to be especially popular and to be over-represented by British people, particularly large groups of those under 25 whose behaviour is uninhibited and resulting in debauched reputations that is difficult to shake off if they attempt to “go upmarket, hoping to attract families instead.”

The concluding comment by Skapinker, that despite millions of livelihoods depending on the summer season, many resorts are fearful of “further infection” from large numbers of inebriated young Brits who abandon their “common sense in the sun” and fail to engage in social distancing is sadly depressing.

In terms of personal experience, in 1988 I recall a driving holiday around the coastal region of Catalonia in north-eastern Spain, the Costa Brava. If you have never done so, some of the scenery is stunning and the Bay of Roses is awe-inspiring; as was the town of Figueres; birthplace of Salvador Dalí and where you will find the *Teatre-Museu Gala* dedicated to his memory.

However, down the coast you will find the resort of Lloret de Mar which, in the 1980s succumbed to the trend to engaged in frenzied building to attract young Brits. I’ve not been back since but 32 years ago there were too many concrete hotels for my taste. From what I could see, there were many of non-British families in 1988. Nonetheless, Lloret de Mar by 1988 looked a little jaded.

Any fears that resorts in Spain, Greece and other very traditional ‘hotspots’ for the British may see a diminution in their number that is caused not so much by the fear of infection from Covid-19, but its economic impact on their jobs.

Larry Elliott states in his *Guardian* economics viewpoint article, ‘Until Covid-19 uncertainty melts away there’s little chance of full economic recovery’. Elliott points to analysis by the British Retail Consortium indicating consumption by shoppers in the second half of June to be 50% compared to a year earlier and pubs and restaurants trading at “half their pre-crisis levels in the first weekend of post-lockdown trading in England.” Such reticence by us risks further economic damage resulting from the dreaded ‘vortex of decline’.

As to how bad things may get no one knows for certain. However, in a presentation by Professor Mark Hart, Professor of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Research Centre, Aston Business School on 14th May 2020, ‘Global Pandemics and the Small Business Economy: Regional Implications of the Economic Meltdown’ various scenarios are considered.

One scenario, based on OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility) and BCC (British Chambers of Commerce) surveys, is utterly devastating in that it suggests that by the end of this year, 831,868 firms could close and a total of 11.4 million jobs lost.

Though at the extreme of pessimistic predictions, such a scenario would result in unemployment of over 30%. This would create consequences for the government making the current challenges, significant as they are, look relatively straightforward.

Though the amount of money dedicated by chancellor Rishi Sunak has been phenomenal thus far, he will undoubtedly be well aware of the potential for a bad situation to become disastrous; particularly if further waves of infection occur.

The stakes are impossibly high and failure is too dreadful to contemplate. People are understandably fearful for themselves and their families.

For many, not going abroad to the sun may represent saving money that is already in short supply and will be needed for expenditure on other priorities. The need to stay home for holidays this summer may be no bad thing though, of course, those who've spent the last four months there because of 'furlough' or working from home, may disagree.

Prior to the revolution in cheap overseas package deals, British workers, especially those employed in factories, went for their holidays in seaside resorts frequently travelling there and home by train. The decline in willingness to holiday in this country has resulted in severe decline in many resorts.

However, the period between the second world war and early 1970s was a period of rapid economic growth and massively increased demand for workers.

What we face now is very different.

Perhaps one 'silver lining' to the dreadful curse that is Covid-19 may be the revival of the Great British seaside holiday if people 'staycation' due to the increased costs and hassle of going abroad to seek the sun.

However, like everything else at present, only time will provide an answer.

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